

Historic Preservation Month 2023

Indiana's Fraternal Organizations



The theme for DHPA's 2023 Historic Preservation Month will focus on structures built or used as fraternal orders headquarters or meeting places. The earliest fraternal organizations in the United States evolved from the guilds of medieval Europe. The ranks within the stonemasonry guild (apprentice, journeyman, and master mason) became the model for the fraternal order of stonemasons—Freemasonry. As other fraternal organizations were founded, they also used a three-tiered structure. In the United States, these groups provided mutual aid for members, conducted philanthropic efforts, and promoted camaraderie. Before commercial insurance and government-supported social services, fraternal organizations provided paying members financial assistance in the case of injury or death. Many such groups also made it part of their mission to take care of widows and orphans.

The "golden age of fraternalism" existed from 1870-1920, and innumerable new fraternal organizations, social clubs, and service organizations were established. Evidence of this trend is documented in the Indianapolis City Directories. There were 17 fraternal organizations in 1800, 48 in 1900, and 61 in 1920 at the height of the "golden age." Many of these groups were only open to white males with good health and strong Protestant morals. Fraternal organizations were non-profits with an established form of government that focused on social, intellectual, educational, charitable, benevolent, moral, fraternal, patriotic, or religious purposes. The groups that served more as social clubs and service organizations banded together for personal interaction or support of a common cause but didn't offer mutual benefits for sick or deceased members or their families. Eventually, organizations expanded to represent different ethnicities and established auxiliary groups for female membership. The women's auxiliary groups focused their activities on social causes.

In the late 1920s and into the 1930s, fraternal organizations struggled with retaining their membership and relevance. The Great Depression impacted every aspect of American life and prevented many from being able to financially continue their involvement in them. At the same time, many organizations deteriorated due to lack of regulation or traditional accounting practices, so fraud and embezzlement resulted in insufficient funds to cover benefit claims. The rise of commercial insurance meant that mutual aid organizations weren't needed. Increasingly, the social service programs of the New Deal also helped cover the benevolent and philanthropic roles that had previously been borne by the fraternal organizations.

Following World War II, fraternal organizations saw a surge in membership as soldiers returning home missed the sense of belonging that they found in the military. By then, the country had recovered economically from the Great Depression and fraternal organizations functioned more as social clubs with charitable efforts. Since then, membership within fraternal organizations has consistently declined.

Over the years many different fraternal organizations have been formed. Below are brief histories of several of the larger organizations that can be found in Indiana along with examples of some of the buildings that they used. We have tried to pick examples throughout the state, but there are many more buildings not included here. To see more examples of fraternal order buildings in Indiana follow along on our Facebook page during Historic Preservation Month in May.

Free & Accepted Masons/Freemasonry

The earliest fraternal organization to appear in the United States was Free & Accepted Masons/Freemasonry, dating to 1715 in Pennsylvania. The first lodge established in Indiana was formed in 1809 in Vincennes with dispensation from the Grand Lodge in Kentucky. More than a half a dozen lodges formed in the next seven years, and after Indiana gained statehood, a Grand Lodge of Indiana was chartered in 1818. Membership included white men in white-collar/professional positions who utilized the tiered structure of the guilds. Once a member reached the highest level of Master Mason, additional side degrees of Scottish Rite, York Rite, Royal Arch, Cryptic Masonry, and Knights Templar were available. Freemasonry was also the first fraternal organization to develop a separate branch for African American members. The Prince Hall Masons started in 1784 in Boston after receiving formal recognition by the Premier Grand Lodge of England (not the American Lodge). Additionally, a chapter of the Chinese Lodge of Masons in America is noted in Indianapolis around 1900. They followed the general tenets of Freemasonry but focused on the brotherhood and social/cultural values of China. It is unknown if there were other chapters in Indiana outside of Indianapolis.



The Murat Temple
502 N. New Jersey Street
Indianapolis, Marion County
Photo by John Maxwell – DNR

The Murat Temple at 502 N. New Jersey Street was built in 1909 and designed by Indianapolis architect Oscar Bohlen. He worked with the Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (Shriners) to create this four-story Moorish Revival building complete with minarets and stained-glass windows. In 1922, Indianapolis architects Rubush and Hunter designed an addition to the main temple and continued the yellow and brown brick banding of the original building to the addition. On the interior, they created the Egyptian Room, which was modeled after the tomb of King Tutankhamun. A 1968 addition constructed of concrete and pebble-finish panels incorporates the banding to help unify the whole building. This building contributes to the National Register of Historic Places-listed Massachusetts Avenue Historic District (NR-0525 & 2563).

The Scottish Rite Cathedral

650 North Meridian Street

Indianapolis, Marion County

Photo by John Maxwell – DNR



The Scottish Rite Cathedral was designed by Indianapolis architect George Schreiber in the Tudor Gothic style at 650 N. Meridian Street. Construction took two years and finished in 1929. The expansive limestone building takes up a half block in the core of downtown Indianapolis and it features a four-story octagon-shaped central tower. Identical three-story towers adorn all four corners of the cathedral. The interior is decorated in a variety of materials including multiple types of marble and wood, art glass windows, and specially made light fixtures, carpets, and furnishings. There is a large ballroom and a 1,100-seat auditorium. This building is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR-0594).

Camden Masonic Temple

213 West Main Street

Camden, Carroll County

Photo from DHPA



The Camden Masonic Temple at 213 W. Main Street, was designed by C. S. Krutch and Co. Built in 1902, this red brick, three-story building is an example of the Romanesque Revival style. Although the storefronts have been altered over the years, the rough-cut limestone accents, the large corner tower with pyramid roof and the variety of complex windows on the top floor make this an eye-catching building. The Camden Masonic Temple is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR-1679).

The Bluffton Free & Accepted Masons

203 West Cherry Street

Bluffton, Wells County

Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR



The Bluffton Free & Accepted Masons constructed this building at 203 W. Cherry Road in 1967. Designed by William Rammel, the Modern extended closed gable front building exhibits many character-defining features of mid-20th century architecture, including a flat roof, flat surfaces and sharp angles, narrow stone veneers, and ribbon windows. It is a contributing resource within the Bluffton Commercial Historic District (NR-2485).

Independent Order of Odd Fellows

The Independent Order of Odd Fellows (IOOF) began in Maryland in 1819 and promoted the efforts of friendship, love, and truth. By 1889, every state had at least one IOOF organization, including Indiana. Membership was open to white men, but unlike the Masons who typically were wealthy white-collar workers and professionals, IOOF members were usually lower middle class and skilled workers. The IOOF was also the first fraternal organization in the country to provide membership opportunities to white women when Indiana resident and IOOF member (and future Vice President) Schuyler Colfax created the Daughters of Rebekah.

Like the Prince Hall Masons, the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows was founded by African American men in 1842 under the auspices of the English order, not the United States order. In 1858, the Household of Ruth was founded in New York as the African American women's auxiliary group.



Cannelton IOOF ***257 Washington Street*** ***Cannelton, Perry County***

Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR

The Cannelton Independent Order of Odd Fellows building at 257 Washington Street was built in 1878. The red brick two-story Italianate building has a cast metal storefront and an original wood awning supported by metal posts over the sidewalk. The IOOF utilized the top floor and there were a series of retail operations on the first floor. It is a contributing resource within the National Register-listed Cannelton Historic District (NR-0758).



Dunfee IOOF ***5310 S 800 E*** ***Dunfee, Whitley County***

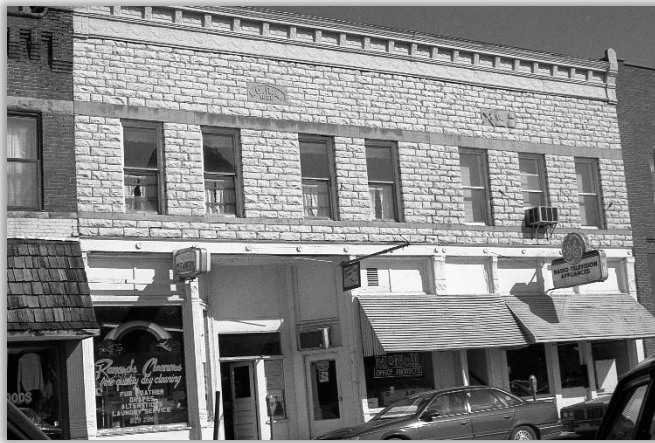
Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR

The Dunfee Independent Order of Odd Fellows originated in the 1880s and this simple wood false-front commercial building at 5310 South 800 East could be the first and only building they used. The lack of windows on the sides of the main level helped maintain the secret "members only" nature of the IOOF. It was identified as a Notable-rated resource in the Whitley County survey of historic sites and structures (IHSSI # 183-021-30005).

Improved Order of Red Men

The Improved Order of Red Men (IORM) started in 1834 in Baltimore, Maryland. The Great Council of Indiana of the Improved Order of Red Men was chartered in 1869. Membership solely included white men up until 1974 and the group based its rituals, costumes, and accessories on assumptions of Native American culture. The IORM

operated as a mutual aid society with a focus on philanthropy, temperance, patriotism, and American history. The women's auxiliary group, the Degree of Pocahontas, formed in the 1880s.



Improved Order of Red Men Building
25-27 Franklin Street
Spencer, Owen County

Photo from DHPA

The Redmen's Lodge is a two-story c. 1880/1898 Italianate building faced in "Spencer stone" a rough-faced, coursed limestone. The eastern half of the building was constructed in the early 1880s, while the western half of the building was constructed in 1898 by the local chapter of the International Order of Red Men. The lodge hall was located on the second story of the building. Dressed limestone beltcourses form the sills and lintels and two limestone panels are located above the second-floor windows: one with "I.O.R.M. 1898" and the other containing symbols of the Redman's Lodge. It is located within the National Register listed Spencer Courthouse Square Historic District (NR-2589).

Knights of Pythias

Established in 1864 in Washington, DC, the Knights of Pythias stressed "loyalty, honor, and friendship." Like most fraternal organizations, membership was open to white men in good health and a belief in a "Supreme Being." In 1895 the Improved Order of Knights of Pythias formed in Indianapolis after the Supreme Lodge of the Knights of Pythias ruled that official Knights business must be conducted in English. This group wanted to conduct business in German. The break proved unpopular, and the group rejoined after a few years.



Knights of Pythias
204-210 West Main Street
Hartford City, Blackford County

Photo from DHPA

The Knights of Pythias in Hartford City was located at 204-210 W. Main Street, designed by A. W. Maxwell. This three-story, buff brick commercial building has four storefronts with varying degrees of alteration on the first floor, cast metal bay windows for offices on the second floor and the Knights of Pythias on the top floor. The building has elements of Romanesque Revival, Classical Revival, and Queen Anne styles. It is a contributing building to the National Register-listed Hartford City Courthouse Square Historic District (NR-1828).



Colored Knights of Pythias

***701-703 North Senate Street
Indianapolis, Marion County***

Photo from DHPA

In 1910, the Colored Knights of Pythias built Castle Hall at 701-705 N. Senate Avenue. Designed by Indianapolis architect Frank Hunter, the building is a subdued example of the Tudor Revival style and was organized by four different local lodges of Colored Knights of Pythias. The Knights met on the upper floors with retail spaces fronting Senate and Walnut (which is now the Cultural Trail). This building is individually in the National Register of Historic Places (NR-2654).

Grand Army of the Republic (GAR)

The Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) formed in 1866 in Illinois for veterans of the Union Army, Navy, and Marines of the Civil War. It allowed both African American and white members so long as they had served honorably in the Civil War, making it one of the first racially integrated fraternal organizations in the country. There were also at least two women members at the national level, Kady Brownwell from Rhode Island and Sarah Emma Edmonds from Michigan. The Indiana GAR was also founded in 1866 and was active until the early 1870s, when there was only one post remaining in Newtonville. A revitalization of the organization occurred in 1879 when a post in Terre Haute applied for a chapter and more posts followed suit. In addition to serving as a mutual aid and social organization, the GAR was one of the first organized advocacy groups to participate in politics. With its very narrow scope of membership, the GAR focused their political efforts on veterans' issues including voting rights for African American veterans and establishing veterans' pensions. Peak membership hit in 1890 with 410,000 members.



Kewanna GAR

***Main Street
Kewanna, Fulton County***

Photo from DHPA

In Kewanna, the Kewanna GAR building was constructed in 1889 and had retail activities on the first floor and GAR activities upstairs. This building is included in the Fulton County Survey as a Contributed-rated building (IHSSI # 049-313-16015).

Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks

The Benevolent and Protective Order of Elks started in 1868 in New York City as a social club, but ten years later it established the Elks Mutual Benefit Association (discontinued in 1907). The Elks had an unofficial auxiliary group called the Benevolent, Patriotic Order of Does that started in 1921, but the Elks refused to officially allow women members until 1995 after being threatened with the loss of their liquor license. In 1899 in Cincinnati, the Improved Benevolent & Protective Order of Elks of the World was founded for African American men.



Benevolent and Protective Orders of Elks Lodge

1102 15th Street

Bedford, Lawrence County

Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR

In Bedford, the Benevolent and Protective Orders of Elks Lodge is a beautiful example of the Neoclassical style. The building is constructed of gold-toned brick with a variety of limestone detailing. It is a contributing resource to the National Register listed Bedford Courthouse Square Historic District (NR-1253).



The Elks Lodge

122 North Broadway

Peru, Miami County

Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR

The Elks Lodge in Peru is a good example of the Art Deco style. The two-story portion of the building was constructed c. 1916 as the Fink House. However, the Elks purchased the property and renovated it for their purposes in 1949. It is a contributing resource within the Peru Courthouse Square Historic District (NR-2488).

Knights of Columbus

The Knights of Columbus started in 1882 in Connecticut as a global service order for Catholic men. It provided benefits for Catholic working-class people and immigrants. The first Knights of Columbus Council in Indiana was constituted in June 1899, followed a few months later by a council in Fort Wayne.



Knights of Columbus

333 W. 5th St

Gary, Lake County

Photo by Brent Drinkut - DNR

The Knights of Columbus building in Gary, located at 333 W. 5th Street, functioned not only as a fraternal meeting space, but also as a hotel. The 10-story Renaissance Revival building was designed by Cleveland architects Porter & McNally in 1925-1926. The red-brown brick and terra cotta building features a ziggurat form – a wide three-story base with additional levels tapering as they rise. The building originally included retail and lobby space on the ground floor, a two-story ballroom and two-story gymnasium on the second and third floors, interspersed with meeting spaces and a restaurant. The upper seven floors consisted of guest rooms and the basement held a swimming pool and bowling alley. It is individually listed in the National Register of Historic Places (NR-0684).



Knights of Columbus

320 W. Jefferson Boulevard

South Bend, St. Joseph County

Photo from DHPA

The Knights of Columbus building in South Bend dates to 1922, and was designed by Nicol, Scholer, and Hoffman. The Renaissance Revival building features light brick with glazed terra cotta accents. Arched windows are highlighted by the twisting engaged columns that form an arcade-like element across the top floor of the building. Medallions of King Ferdinand and Queen Isabella of Spain, the benefactors of Christopher Columbus' voyage (and namesake to the Knights of Columbus) are present. This building contributes to the South Bend Central Business District (NR-0708).

Loyal Order of Moose

The Loyal Order of Moose was founded in 1888 in Louisville, Kentucky as a men's social club. Lodges were soon established in Crawfordsville and Frankfort. By 1906, only two lodges remained, both in Indiana, but they worked to revive the organization, transforming it into a mutual aid organization providing injury and death benefits. By 1912, there were almost 500,000 working-class members and the Women of the Moose, the auxiliary branch for women, emerged the next year.



Loyal Order of Moose Lodge No. 167 111 South 8th Street Richmond, Wayne County

Photo from DHPA

The Loyal Order of Moose Lodge Number 167 in Richmond is located within the Old Richmond Historic District (NR-0001 & NR-1744), but because of the nomination's period of significance at the time of listing, this resource is a non-contributing building within the district. Constructed c. 1985, it is a 20th century contemporary commercial building on South 8th Street.

Fraternal Order of Eagles

The Fraternal Order of Eagles began in Seattle, Washington in 1898 by a group of six theater owners. Originally formed to aid those in the performing arts, membership expanded rapidly across the country as a result of touring theater groups of actors, stagehands, and playwrights. In 1927, the women's auxiliary group began, but membership didn't become available for African Americans until the late 1970s.



Fraternal Order of Eagles 106 West Market Street Wabash, Wabash County

Photo by Brent Drinkut – DNR

The Fraternal Order of Eagles Theater in Wabash is a four-story red brick building designed by Toledo architect Orland Johnson in the Classical Revival style in 1906. The theater had a capacity of 1,163 taking up the first to third floors, with 18 offices, two ground-floor retail shops, and a fourth-floor meeting hall used by the Eagles. The Eagles Theater also received a Historic Preservation Fund grant from the DHPA in 2004 for a preservation planning study, which aided in the recent rehabilitation of the building. Today, the building functions as an entertainment venue and rental/meeting space run by the Honeywell Foundation. It is listed in the National Register of

Historic Places as a contributing resource to the Downtown Wabash Historic District (NR-0799).



Fraternal Order of Eagles

2520 Broadway

Fort Wayne, Allen County

Photo from DHPA

In Fort Wayne, the Fraternal Order of Eagles building is a good example of the Modern Box form with its limestone, glass, and aluminum façade with strong geometric patterns. It is a surveyed resource within the Allen County Survey (IHSSI #003-215-55349).

American Legion

Founded in Paris in 1919, the American Legion never intended to serve as a mutual aid society, instead, it was very active in politics and lobbying in support of active service members and veterans. Now headquartered in Indianapolis (IHSSI #098-296-15003 and within the Indiana World War Memorial Plaza Historic District, NR-0898), the American Legion drafted and helped pass what is commonly referred to as the “G.I. Bill.” Members coordinate community events and support the Department of Veterans’ Affairs hospitals and clinics.



American Legion

902 Eastern Avenue

Connersville, Fayette County

Photo by John Maxwell – DNR

The American Legion in Connersville (constructed c. 1940) is an example of simplified Classicism from the pre-World War II years with elements of the Modern style of the postwar years. It is a surveyed resource in the Fayette County Survey (IHSSI #041-131-27522).

There are many other fraternal organizations for which there is little to no documentation of them constructing organization-specific buildings. It seems likely that many ethnic/race-based groups met at places of worship or other ethnic social clubs. Many ethnically based fraternal organizations offered benefits, but also took a stand politically for better living/working conditions, anti-discrimination, and other issues related to their members.